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Identical letters dated 20 August 2008 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose, in my capacity as Chairman of the Arab Group for the month of August, a position paper submitted by the Arab Group on the Review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which will be held on 4 September 2008 at United Nations Headquarters in New York (see annex).

The Arab Group requests that the present letter and its annex be issued as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 108, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador
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Chairman of the Arab Group

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[Original: Arabic]

Position Paper Submitted by the Arab Group on the Review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

The Arab States attach great importance to the efforts to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations for they have been the most countries in the world to suffer from terrorism that claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent people among their citizens. In this context, the League of Arab States (LAS) has been at the forefront in developing a counter-terrorism Arab strategy that was adopted by the 1997 Council of Arab Ministers of the Interior. The League of Arab States has also formulated a Comprehensive Arab Convention against Terrorism in 1998. This legal framework provides an important regional mechanism that complements the one established by the General Assembly of the United Nations, pursuant to Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. The Arab States have already implemented many of the measures provided for by the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy while other measures are in the process of implementation.

The Arab Group attaches also great importance to all measures included in the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, particularly those aimed at addressing the root causes of terrorism, and the circumstances and factors conducive to its spread. The Arab Group stresses its firm position that terrorism should not and must not be linked to any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group. It underlines the need for everyone to adhere to this principle as provided for in the Strategy. In this context, the Arab Group calls for the promotion of dialogue, tolerance and understanding among civilizations, cultures, peoples and religions and for the criminalization of contempt to or defamation of religions or targeting their symbols, considering that such acts are an incitement to hatred that might lead to terrorism. In this regard, the Arab Group commends the World Conference on Dialogue, held in Madrid, Spain, on 16 July 2008 under the auspices of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz, King of Saudi Arabia, and His Majesty Don Juan Carlos I, King of Spain.

The Group notes that the non-inclusion of a definition of the concept of terrorism and State terrorism in the Strategy, due to the absence of an internationally agreed definition of terrorism, would hinder achieving the international efforts to combat terrorism. The Group emphasizes in this regard the need to finalize discussions aimed at preparing a comprehensive United Nations Convention on Terrorism that includes a specific definition of international terrorism and State terrorism, distinguishes between terrorism and the legitimate right of peoples to resist occupation and aggression, and takes into account that divine laws and international and regional covenants do not condone the killing of innocent civilians.

The Group encourages the establishment of an International Counter-Terrorism Centre under the umbrella of the United Nations as envisaged in the Strategy.

The Arab Group attaches paramount importance to the success of the Strategy review process despite the lack of a clear methodology to prepare for this important meeting. As a contribution to the success of the Strategy review process, the Group wishes to make the following observations:

1. The Arab Group stresses the importance of following up on the implementation of the Strategy in a comprehensive and non-selective manner, and the pivotal role played by the General Assembly, as the primary organ with the widest representation in the United Nations system, in addressing the issue of combating terrorism in all its aspects.

2. The Arab Group stresses the need to make optimal use of the General Assembly meeting to be held on 4 September 2008 in order to discuss the implementation of the Strategy, and of the forthcoming meetings in the context of the periodic review, by addressing various difficulties and deficiencies that hinder the implementation of various items of the Strategy in the most convenient manner.

3. Consequently, the Arab Group welcomes the regulation of the relationship between Member States and the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) within the purview of the latter's mandate, as stipulated in the General Assembly draft resolution on the Review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Such an approach would allow for a wider participation by Member States, as the primary responsible parties for policy guidance and strategy implementation, and for providing them with the capacity to supervise the activity of CTITF in the context of transparency and accountability.

4. The Arab Group considers, in this regard, that the institutionalization of CTITF within the Secretariat of the United Nations and endowing it with the necessary resources would provide a convenient basis for an organized, constructive and integrated contribution to the efforts made by the Member States to achieve the objectives of the Strategy.

5. With regard to the symposium for the victims of terrorism that the Secretary-General of the United Nations intends to hold, the Arab Group, while expressing its deepest sympathy to the victims of terrorism, considers that it is important not to link the issue of Strategy review, with its global dimensions, with the theme of the symposium, whose organizational details must be carefully examined in a context of full transparency and in consultation with all Member States. This will allow for everybody's considerations to be taken into account, avoid politicization and imbalance and guarantee that the symposium will not be counterproductive and deviate from the lofty purpose of holding it, namely to assist the victims of terrorism.